

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D. C. May 5, 1966. The National Gallery of Art will have its 5-5/8 inches by 4-1/8 inches acquisition, Saint George and the Dragon, behind a magnifying glass when it goes on view Saturday (May 7) in Gallery 40.

"The details of this almost miraculous little panel painting are so delicate," Director John Walker explained, "we decided the public should have the same opportunity we did -- that is, to examine it under a magnifying glass."

However, viewers can readily see Saint George and the Dragon without the visual aid, which is a five-inch enlarger set into the picture's protective glass case.

It is possible that the artist used a magnifying glass himself. In the foreground, he painted a 2-1/2 inch Saint George as a youthful knight about to slay a 3-inch dragon, with a tiny Princess Cleodolinda praying nearby. Clothes, animals, and accoutrements are detailed with infinite care, and the background is filled with a myriad of sights. The landscape holds a fortified harbor town, a river reaching to distant mountains, sailing ships, high rocks and a

medieval castle far in the cloud-filled distance.

The 15th century masterpiece was acquired in March by the National Gallery at auction in London through the Ailsa Mellon Bruce Fund. The purchase followed research by the National Gallery's Kress Professor-in-Residence, Jakob Rosenberg, who considers it "just short of a miracle that the artist was able to compress an entire world into an area not much larger than a post card."

Research indicates that the picture is most likely by the hand of Rogier van der Weyden, a 15th century artist from Tournai who sojourned in the City of Bruges from 1432 to 1435, and there came under the influence of the older van Eyck brothers. The panel has been traditionally attributed to Hubert van Eyck, but more recent scholars have attributed it to the young Rogier van der Weyden.

Director Walker explained further that some of Rogier van der Weyden's early works of this period, including the National Gallery's picture, show the double influence of his Tournai master, Robert Campin, and of the van Eycks.

"Although absolute authorship is practically impossible to assign after more than 500 years, especially in the absence of a signature," he said, "definite attribution is secondary. Saint George and the Dragon is a major masterpiece of early 15th century Flemish painting."

This version of Saint George and the Dragon is from

the earliest period of Flemish oil painting when little is known about any artist. For example, all that remains about Hubert van Eyck is his name on the frame of the Ghent Altarpiece and a few questionable entries in the town record book.

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Black-and-white glossy photographs or color transparencies on loan for purposes of publication are available from William W. Morrison, Assistant to the Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D. C. Area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 225.